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Group's aid to contras probed

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WASHINGTON — The US attorney's office in Miami is investigating allegations of extensive criminal activities by a group of Western mercenaries, working for the Nicaraguan rebels, that include gun-running, military raids and a plot to attack the US Embassy in Costa Rica.

Anna Barnett, a spokeswoman for the office of US Attorney Leon Kellner, said last week in acknowledging the investigation: "It sounds like something out of a bad [Robert] Ludlum novel; there are so many plots and subplots. At this point we are following leads, and I can't say when we will be finished. It is a very hot topic."

According to several people who have been questioned by federal authorities, the investigation centers on a group of a dozen or so mercenaries sent to Costa Rica last year to help the rebels open a battlefield against Nicaragua's Sandinista government along the southern border of Nicaragua.

Besides trying to pin down the exact nature of the mercenaries' activities last year, investigators, including FBI counterintelligence agents, are trying to determine if any US agencies controlled their operation.

Two Americans and one British man who participated in some of the activities have told interviewers recently that they either had assumed or had been told by superiors that their efforts were being directed by CIA employees or contract agents.

Although the Reagan administration supports the rebels, who are known to be active, the CIA has been prohibited by Congress from providing covert military assistance to them since 1984.

In a statement released yesterday, Sen. John F. Kerry said his staff has been investigating the al-

legations. He said his office has received "substantial corroboration" of some of the charges, and he called on Congress to investigate the case fully.

Besides helping train the contras, some of the mercenaries who were separately interviewed by the Globe and others in recent weeks said they themselves had been involved in:

- Collecting 6 tons of arms and munitions from contra sympathizers in the Miami area and having the equipment secretly flown to Central America, where it was divided up among several contra groups.

Private sales of military weapons are restricted under US criminal law, and no such sales can be made without authorization by the State Department. In addition, the shipments must be approved by the US Customs Service.

- Taking part in a raid of a Sandinista camp 15 miles inside the Nicaragua border in April 1985 that reportedly resulted in the shooting of dozens of members of the Nicaraguan military. US neutrality statutes prohibit American citizens from taking part in hostile action against any country with which the United States is not at war.

- Plotting an assault on the US Embassy in Costa Rica's capital city, San Jose. The attack was supposedly going to be made with Russian weapons and was said to have been made to look as if it had been done by Sandinistas.

That way, according to an account of one person who said he had been asked to join the mercenary group, the attack would arouse US public outrage against the Sandinistas and lead to increased military aid to the contras and, possibly, US military intervention.

These allegations and several others have been probed by Kerry and his staff for several months.

In his statement yesterday, Kerry said, "For some time now, I have been receiving information alleging a broad range of illegal actions by those involved in the contra movement. Over the past few months my office has engaged in an investigation of alleged drug smuggling, gun-running, Neutrality Act violations and other equally, if not more serious, offenses.

"To date," he continued, "we have received substantial corroboration of these activities, some of which shock the conscience. It is my personal belief that because these charges involve important aspects of American foreign policy, it's vital for Congress to investigate these matters fully in order to uncover the truth."

The allegation about an assault on the US Embassy in Costa Rica was raised several months ago by Jesus Garcia, a former Dade County, Fla., corrections officer, shortly after Garcia was convicted and imprisoned for possession of an unregistered automatic machine gun.

Garcia, according to his lawyer, John Mattes, an assistant federal public defender in Miami, has passed an FBI-administered lie detector test on the subject.

In a recent interview with the Globe, Garcia said he was approached early last year by Tom Posey, the head of an Alabama-based private organization, Civilian Military Assistance, which provides civilian "freedom fighters" and supplies to the contras.

Garcia, who describes himself as an ardent anticommunist, agreed to help raise donations from his contacts in the Cuban-American community in Miami, but said he could not join the mercenary group.

Garcia said the subject of the attack on the US Embassy was raised during a meeting of several mercenaries who had been recruited by Posey and others to go to Central America to help the contras.

Garcia said one of the men

took out a piece of paper with a hand-drawn blueprint of the US Embassy in Costa Rica. In a telephone interview on Monday, Posey acknowledged that he had tried to recruit Garcia to join a group of about six others in Miami who were about to leave for Central America.

However, Posey said he had told that group, as he does all men that he recruits for the contras, "not to be involved in any military action" and that "they can only use their weapons if they are personally threatened."

In addition, Posey denied ever being involved in any discussions in which an attack on the US Embassy in Costa Rica was mentioned. He also denied knowing anyone who had been involved in such discussions.

According to Garcia, a mercenary said that the group had been offered a million-dollar contract by Colombian drug dealers to kill Louis Tambo, the US ambassador to Colombia, who was about to be transferred to Costa Rica. Garcia said the Colombian cocaine dealers had been angered by Tambo's efforts to crack down on drug trafficking.

Garcia turned down the offer, he said, because "I served in Vietnam and had seen too many

Americans killed there."

He conceded that the people he put the mercenaries in contact with donated about 6 tons of weapons material, ammunition and military gear. In early March, he said, the material was loaded onto a chartered plane at Fort Lauderdale's main airport and flown to Central America.

One of those who, according to sources, say participated in the arms shipment was Steve Carr, a 36-year old Florida man who had been anxious to join the contras since 1984.

Carr, now in prison in Costa Rica on smuggling charges, spent several weeks with the contras and several other members of the Miami group along the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border between March and late April 1985.

According to sources who have interviewed Carr, the members of the camp spent most of their time on nonmilitary exercises or cleaning their weapons.

But in the second week of April, with a Cuban-American leading them, about 20 members of the camp forayed into southern Nicaragua. Early in the evening, about 15 miles from the Costa Rican border, they came upon an encampment of Sandinistas who were just about to enter their mess hall for dinner.

Carr told the sources that his group fired numerous grenades into the camp, and on returning from the raid was told that they had killed or wounded about 70 Sandinistas.

But, Carr told the interviewers, an American who owned a farm in northern Costa Rica, near the

contra camp, angrily criticized them for the raid.

Carr and Peter Glibbery, a former British soldier and explosives specialist who had traveled to Costa Rica to help the contras, reportedly said the American farmer had directed some of the activities while they were in Costa Rica.

The farmer was upset about the raid because Congress was then taking up President Reagan's 1985 aid package to the Nicaraguan rebels, according to the sources who interviewed Carr and Glibbery. The farmer did not want anything done to jeopardize that vote, Carr reportedly said.

Little publicity was given to the attack, but the House voted in April to reject Reagan's request for military funding for the contras.

However, news of the raid reportedly did disturb the Costa Rican government, which has publicly proclaimed its neutrality in the Nicaraguan conflict.

Within days of the action, five members of the group were arrested by Costa Rican police officers, allegedly for possession of munitions. Since then, the five, Carr, Glibbery, John Davis, also a former British serviceman; Frank Thompson, a former Florida state trooper; and Claude Sheppard, a former French paratrooper, have been incarcerated at La Reforma prison outside of San Jose.

Last week, federal investigators from Miami traveled to Costa Rica to gather information on the case, said Anna Barnett of the US Attorney's office in Miami. However, she declined to say whether the investigators had interviewed the mercenaries in jail there.

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